

Fishing Program Tips – Nick Bowman (PIMO)

- **Access** – have a plan for handicap access to your site. If the site is away from a parking area make sure the route to the fishing site is easy to follow. Lots of signs
- **Rest Rooms** – if your site does not have facilities nearby, rent a port-a-john
- **Donations** – Various big stores have donation processes that must be completed months in advance of your program if you want donations from them. I.E. Dicks, Cabelas, Walmart, Ollies, and most of these are online. If you are interested in having a program in the summer I would suggest reaching out to these places in Jan/Feb. I have had some success with small bait shops by calling on the phone and mailing requests on DPR letterhead. With the smaller stores, it seems to be a good thing to reach out in person or by phone and explain that this is a program aimed at getting people outdoors fishing and any little bit helps. Even a single lure, or pack of hooks is a valuable door prize for a new fisherman. Also give these donators their due when giving away their products.
- **Prizes** – I generally have a couple of rod and reel combos to give out as “grand prizes” for whatever you set as a prize worthy item. I do biggest fish overall and biggest fish per age group, it’s also fun to give away prizes for the smallest fish. These are not expensive rod and reel combos. We’ve bought them from our park budget on lean donation years and also have had help from our Friends group.
- **Organization** – If you are giving away prizes for what the participants catch I keep a large three ring binder with all the participant info and organize it by last name. This allows whomever is recording fish weights or lengths to quickly find the participant and write down the information. I print the sheets ahead of time and these also serve as their check sheet to ensure they go through learning stations prior to fishing, helping to get the education component in. I will attach a sample sheet, feel free to edit to fit your needs.
- **Education** – At our annual fishing derby we will have 2-3 learning stations participants go through prior to getting their bait. They are given a sheet when they register that they take with them to each station, once they go through the station the educator checks their sheet, when they get all their checks they trade their sheet for bait and go fishing. The sheets are then put in the large binder for record keeping. Our stations are generally casting (backyard bass), knot tying and safety.
- **Safety** – we generally have a learning station dedicated to safety – topics include being aware of your surroundings when you cast, so you don’t hook your neighbor. Techniques for safe casting can be discussed at the casting station using casting weights that can’t hook people. We hold our derby at an old farm pond and ticks are an issue so we talk about ticks, show some ticks to people and offer bug spray if they want it. Those are the big two safety issues here.
- **Extra Activities for participants that get tired of fishing** – having extra things on hand for people to do that get bored is a good idea. Whether these are coloring pages from the NC CATCH workbook or just letting people try to catch backyard bass, a backup activity or 2 is a good idea. One year one of our Rangers brought along a friend who did face painting, that was a huge hit.
- **Shade** – if you are hosting a lengthy fishing event in the open have your PASU or Friends Group buy the park a portable canopy to provide a sheltered place for fish weighing, registration, etc.

- **Volunteer/Staff** – get everything set up early and have your volunteers/staff on site at least 30 minutes prior to the posted start time. I recommend pulling in a comfortable amount of staff/vol. At our last fishing derby two Rangers had to break away to respond to calls twice during the derby. If we hadn't utilized available RIES, vol. and intern staff we would have been left with one ranger trying to manage all the participants at the derby, while the other two responded. Three Rangers opening on the weekend is a luxury at some parks but at times it still may not be enough. Ask for help with big involved programs, if it is just a simple fishing program without prizes/ learning stations then it may be more manageable with less staff. Maybe the size of the event should reflect the amount of help you have with managing it?
- **Food/Water** – Try to have at least water, ice and a cooler for staff and volunteers to utilize. If you can manage feed your volunteers and make them feel appreciated. Extra sunscreen and bug spray is a good idea too.
- **Loaner Rods/Tackle** – If you have the ability have some tackle you can loan out. Make sure to label the tackle and have a check out procedure so you get your stuff back. This is a great use for lost and found tackle that the owner never returns to get, put it to use as loaner tackle. There is also the NCWRC Tackle loaner program that your park may want to participate in.

Fishing Program Tips – Steve McMurray (JORD)

Here's what I recall for our first one.

1. **Plan ahead, start planning for the event as far out as you can**
2. **Partnerships, get as many likeminded organizations to either donate or assist with planning**
3. **Set monthly meetings prior to event**
4. **Recruit volunteers which kind of go hand in hand with #2**
5. **Advertise, use Facebook, local news outlets and such**
6. **Ask for money, from your local friends group or apply for grant from our friends group**
7. **Have give aways**
8. **Scavenger hunt is a big hit with ours. As participants check in, they are given a sheet of paper with all the demonstrations and activities being done. Once the participant has everything checked that they participated in, they bring the sheet back for a free gift.**

Derek Parsons now oversees our Fishing Fiesta for any questions for our event.